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ABSTRACT

Although rural schools often are the center of community life, ownership of rural education is not necessarily vested in all elements of the community. Without diligent planning, many members of the rural community do not become stockholders in the community's largest enterprise, public education. The program approach to public education has resulted in isolated structures controlled from within. "Program" schools are input- and labor-intensive, tend to be isolated from the rest of society (thus necessitating cumbersome procedures for outside involvement), have a management orientation, and are not cost-effective. "Process" schools, on the other hand, are outcomes-intensive, use community networks in the daily performance of school functions, rely heavily on internal and external communication, disperse management functions to the lowest level possible, and are cost-effective. Making the transition from program to process requires identification of all shareholders in education, followed by development of a common, community-supported mission for local education. A functional procedure to ensure that the community (i.e., the shareholders) have been identified may be called the "spectral approach," since one can identify a particular member of the community by the location that member occupies on a spectrum, much as one identifies an element by the band of light it absorbs within the light spectrum. Thus, the spectral approach to community identification consists of placing community groups along the continuum of a single identifiable factor such as age. Superimposing an agency spectrum over the community spectrum provides a basis on which to build community networks and identify gaps in services. Another important feature of the process model is its ability to engage community members, particularly parents, in supportive and constructive roles. (SV)

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Building School-Communities

By Dr. Larry A. Blackmer

Editorial note: The following is based on a presentation made before the National Rural Education Association at that organization's national conference, October 12, 1992, Traverse City, Michigan.

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Perhaps the basic theme behind the Community School movement of the late 60's and early 70's was the belief that "the school is the community....the community is the school". In most rural settings, that statement correctly identifies the relationship between the community and the school. Rural schools, often the largest employer in the area, become the center for community life; serving to provide not only education but also a variety of social and cultural needs. It would appear from this description that rural education is a community enterprise, with ownership vested equally in all elements of the community. However, in reality, unless diligent planning is provided, many members of the rural community do not become stock holders in the community's largest enterprise the public school "system". (The word "system" appears in quotes; the author suggesting that public education is not a true system.) The loss of ownership results in a separation of community and school, with the later taking on an identity all of its own. Such a separation is not usually planned, in fact, such a separation is often the result of failure to plan.

Historically, American education has advanced the ideals of a nation, through the planned application of local educational programs. This so called "program" approach has resulted in the development of isolated structures, that, while locally controlled, have an administrative structure controlled from the inside; often excluding members of the community from exercising the control intended in the very organization of public school districts. Program models of public education consistently present a group of identifiable characteristics. They are input intensive; the value of the enterprise often being described in terms such as dollars expendable per child or revenue received per child. They tend to isolate themselves from the rest of society, building cumbersome

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procedures for outside involvement. While they publicly invite community participation, participants often complain of not feeling welcome. Program schools are labor intensive; vesting nearly every element of organizational life to paid participants. They work hard at the delivery of programs, measuring effectiveness by the amount of effort that goes into the delivery system. Such schools have a management orientation. Large amounts of time and energy are required to manage the program, its people, its products. Finally, program schools are not cost effective. Due to an inputs orientation, all involvement is seen as resource consumptive, due largely to the isolation in which even departments within the same school district operate. Program schools are not true systems, in that they fail to function as either a single unit or as coordinated subsets of a larger organization.

Largely as a result of the Community School movement, process schools have developed. These schools are markedly different from the program schools discussed above. First and foremost, process schools are results (outcomes) intensive. The measure of success is identified by the outcomes that are produced and measured against an identifiable standard, such as desired or required student performance. Schools of this nature effectively utilize community networks in the daily performance of school community functions. Much will be said about networks in following sections. Process schools are communication intensive. Unlike program schools that communicate outwardly, process schools utilize two-way communication devices and procedures. Internal communication is regarded as being as essential as external communication within process driven schools. Newsletters, largely produced in program school for public relations effect, are replaced with face-to-face encounter with community shareholders. Process school administrators, as well as all members of the learning team, listen more than they talk. These schools are vibrant; the management function is carried out at the lowest level possible, leaving the district to invest heavily in leadership forms of human enterprise. Perhaps due to all of these orientations, process schools are cost effective. No longer a fortress unto itself, cost once born by the isolated school district, become diminished due to the fiscal and human resources that networks bring.

The first step toward developing a school-community is to make the transition from program to process. To make that transition, one needs first to identify who makes up the community or more correctly, the many

communities that exist within the school community. It should not be assumed that everyone in the community is in agreement with the role and mission of the school. The development of a common mission is, however, essential to the development of a process model of education. Without a clearly defined mission, leadership cannot bring the resources to focus on the outcomes that process model educational institutions provide.

A functional procedure to ensure that the community or the several communities, (i.e. shareholders) have been identified is found by using a "spectral approach" to community identification. This process is based on the scientific principle of the analysis of various elements using the properties of white light. While this may sound a strange analogy, its usefulness as a means of separating out and identifying the various members of a community will become apparent. Using the analogy of the spectrum, one can identify a particular member of the community by the location occupied on a spectrum, much like one identifies an element by the band of light it absorbs within the light spectrum. Recalling our days in junior high science, we know that white light is made up of the "colors of the rainbow" - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. These colors are commonly referred to as the spectrum of colors. Applying a spectral approach to communities, we find that several different "frequencies or communities" are identifiable; age perhaps being the simplest to demonstrate. Just as the color red has a given limit or frequency within the light spectrum, people also fall somewhere along the age spectrum; from new born to age 100+. Age may, therefore, be thought of as a given "frequency", age five being the most common age for school admission.

A COMMUNITY SPECTRUM

A B B B/C C C/D D D E E F F/G G G H H H H/J J J J J K K K K >

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27

GROUPS:

A = NEWBORNS
B = INFANTS AND TODDLERS
C = PRE-SCHOOL AGED
D = EARLY ELEMENTARY
E = MIDDLE ELEMENTARY
F = UPPER ELEMENTARY
G = MIDDLE SCHOOL / JR.HIGH
H = HIGH SCHOOL
J = COLLEGE AGE/VOC/CAREER

K = YOUNG ADULTS
K1: SINGLE ADULTS
K2: SINGLE PARENTS
K3: MARRIED ADULTS
K4: MARRIED PARENTS
K5: EMPLOYED
K6: UNEMPLOYED
L= MIDDLE ADULT LEARNER

Using the spectral approach provides the researcher with a methodology to place the various members of the community along a continuum where separation is determined by a single identifiable factor. In the example above, educational placement is used to identify specific groups of learners. Using the same process, an analysis of needs is superimposed over an analysis of need provider based on the age of the client to be served.

Similarly, an agency spectrum (see insert: Agency Spectrum, Infant and Preschool Age Group) may be used with the same age class to determine services being provided.

AGENCY SPECTRUM

INFANT & PRESCHOOL AGE GROUP

A B H E F G K DJ CI

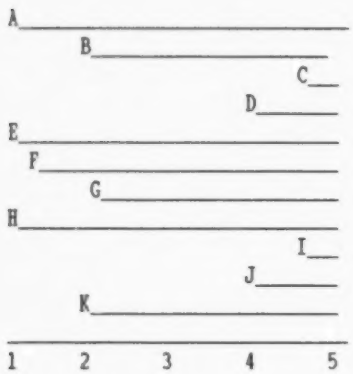
1 2 3 4 5

AGENCY / SERVICES

A: COUNTY EXTENSION / PARENTING
B: PARENTS REACHING OUT / DRUG ALCOHOL ED
C: D.A.R.E./ DRUG EDUCATION
D: COMM. ED./ EDUCATION
E: HEALTH SERVICE / HEALTH CARE HEALTH ED.
F: COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH / HEALTH
G: COMMUNITY COOR CHILD CARE / CHILD CARE
H: LOCAL CHURCHES / FAMILY SERVICES
I: AREA SCHOOLS / EDUCATION
J: HEADSTART / EDUCATION & SOCIAL
K: D.S.S. / FAMILY SUPPORT

Note, that in that spectrum, as well as in the companion spectrum (Looking for the Disinfranchised from the Schools Within Our Service Area), school involvement is not evident until the child reaches age five.

LOOKING FOR THE DISENFRANCHISED FROM THE SCHOOLS WITHIN OUR SERVICE AREA.



A: COUNTY EXTENSION
B: PARENTS REACHING OUT
C: D.A.R.E.
D: COMMUNITY EDUCATION
E: HEALTH SERVICES
F: COMM. MENTAL HEALTH
G: COMMUNITY COOR. CHILD CARE
H: LOCAL CHURCHES
I: AREA SCHOOLS
J: HEADSTART
K: DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

However, several other agencies are involved in the education of the child or with the parent at a much earlier point in the life of the child. Such information provides a basis on which networks can and should be built. Perhaps the greatest strength of this approach lies in its ability to identify "gaps" in services and the identity of possible networks that can be deveioped to fill those "gaps". Networks so identified and developed move the district toward being a process system and a school-community. The following illustration represents the same community. In Exhibit A, a program approach has been utilized to provide services to a child. In Exhibit B, a process model, resulting in a coordinated network of providers, is illustrated.

In addition to the identification and definition of community, another important product of the process model is its ability to engage community members in appropriate roles. Each year, at parent/teacher conference time, schools send the following message, or one like it, to parents: "Research has shown that academic performance improves when parents are involved in the education of their children". The attempt here is obvious - to attract parents and encourage their participation in the parent/teacher conference, assuming this to be an involvement in the

EXIBIT A: UNCOORDINATED SERVICE EFFORT

HEALTH SERVICES		
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT		COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH
PARENTS REACHING OUT		COMMUNITY COORDINATED CHILD CARE
D.A.R.E.	CHILD	CHURCHES
COMMUNITY EDUCATION		AREA SCHOOLS
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES		HEADSTART

educational process that directly affects educational performance. However, a review of the research also suggest that parental involvement in the education of a child is not as significant as suggested in the above statement of research finding. In fact, in the review of research on academic performance, parental involvement rated only a 6 on a scale of 1 to 20.

EXIBIT B: A NETWORK FOR INFANT & PRESCHOOL AGE GROUP COORDINATED EFFORT

HEADSTART	PARENTS REACHING OUT	DARE	
COUNTY EXTENSION			CHILD/FAMILY
AREA SCHOOLS	COMMUNITY EDUCATION	HEALTH SERVICES	
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH	DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES		
COMMUNITY COORDINATED CHILD CARE		LOCAL CHURCHES	

Can it be that parent participation at parent/teacher conference is not an essential part of the educational process? If not, then why invest such large amounts of time in trying to engage parents in the educational program? The operative word in that question is the last word in the sentence - program. Education is not a program, it is a process. Parents need to be involved in the process, perhaps providing the most significant

contributions as the child's "first teacher" before the child enters the "formal" educational setting. Parents need not prepare a child for entrance into school, a stated goal in Goals 2000. However, parents need to be a part of the process of developing schools that accept all children at whatever point of readiness they possess. The concept that the child must be ready for school is a program concept, the philosophy that the school must be ready for the child is a process statement. If we are to engage members of the community within our schools it becomes incumbent on those seeking, as well as those being sought, to enter the relationship with the proper orientation and expectations. Program schools, cannot by their vary nature, provide for the depth of relationship that is necessary to be effective in an era of diminished support for public education. Process schools, on the other hand, which engage members of the community and build a school-community system of education will be productive and will restructure themselves to meet the demands of a world economy. Process schools will be adaptive, networked and consistently responsive to needs to restructure as times and conditions change. Students educated in such systems will be world class citizens equipped with skills to be competitive in a world economy. Process schools will endure the restructuring currently underway in American education. They will likely lead in that endeavor.